

Friday (Brother Lawrence)

When, on occasion, he went a long time without thinking about God, he did not trouble himself, but after confessing his wretchedness to God, he returned to him with all the more confidence. He had reached the point, he said, where he thought only of God. When outward occupation called his mind a little from thinking on God, there would come to him from God's part some reminder which invested his soul, giving it some stronger sense of God. He was even more at one with God in his common activities than when he turned from them for the formal activities of retreat.

Scripture (Mark 12:28-33)

One of the scribes who had been listening appreciated that Jesus had given a good answer and put this question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'this is the first: Listen Israel, you must love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: you must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master. This is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'

martben1@btinternet.com

15th Week of Ordinary Time

It's not what you know, it's who you love

Moses is clear about what the Israelites must do above all when they enter the Promised Land: (Deuteronomy 30), they must obey God's Word. It won't be difficult because to God's Law isn't something learned in ivory towers, nor is it restricted to theologians or lawyers: it is in the heart (where decisions are made) and in the mouth, (which reveals what is in the heart). Do this, and they will have life to the full.

By the time of Jesus, how to love God would depend on who you asked, as Jesus' conversation with the lawyer about which is the greatest commandment shows, (Luke 10:25 – 37.). Jesus' answer, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, was a deeply troubling story told to one individual who, in Luke's Gospel, is on the verge of a breakthrough in understanding Jesus. (Luke 10:25-37) – it is not the generalised 'be nice to people' story it is generally used as: focusing on the Samaritan's act reduces the other two characters to mean-spirited and petty individuals, who are too busy or too self-important. (the priest and the Levite were doing exactly the right thing, obeying God in the way that they understood as devout and upright religious people.)

When the lawyer puts his question to Jesus, I think he must have been in a state of real turmoil. He had been sitting and listening to Jesus (he 'stood up'), who had just been thanking God for revealing the truth to the little children, not the learned and the clever – which he clearly was. Using the phrase 'little children' would ring alarm bells for the lawyer, since they were not subject to the Law. Understandably, the lawyer would want to know what the role of the Law (of Moses) was to be in this new Kingdom, so 'tests' Jesus (i.e. put his teachings to the test rather than the negative 'disconcert him' translation.). Any Jew would put 'love God' as the most important, but not many would link it with 'love your neighbour', an almost minor verse in Leviticus amongst all the instructions on worship, sacrifice and many other rules. Most lawyers would presumably link 'love God' with 'by keeping the Law'. This lawyer's answer, then, shows he is clearly in tune with Jesus, but he needs to know who his neighbour is, since his knowledge of the Law would make clear the many ways people could put themselves outside the Law. All of his life, the lawyer has believed that anyone who is outside the Law is 'unclean' and should be avoided, and so not a neighbour? No wonder he was 'anxious to justify himself'. The deeply troubling parable draws him to what must have been a very difficult conclusion: the priest and the Levite who leave the victim are people who keep the Law of Moses, (if they had touched the blood-stained, apparently dead man, they would become unclean), but the Samaritan is someone who enacts it fully by loving his neighbour. The problem for the lawyer is that the Samaritans had broken the 'love only God' rule, by adopting the practices of pagan religions, yet it is this man who loves God by loving his neighbour. Jesus tells him to be like the outcast Samaritan, not the religious Jews!

As is often the case with Luke, the story is left unfinished – we are left to answer for ourselves whether the lawyer did as Jesus advised, which in turn leaves us with the question, 'would I?'. It is the Samaritan's compassion and generosity in his heart showed true obedience to the Law, whilst the other two were unable to show love because their understanding of 'Love God' was limited to rules and ritual observances. Laws and rituals are, of course, important as guides but, as Jesus makes clear, I can obey all the rules and yet, like the priest and the Levite, not love God. Martin Bennett

Monday (Martin Buber)

There is something that can be found in one place. It is a great treasure which may be called the fulfilment of existence. This treasure can be found in the place where one stands. We strive to find – somewhere – what we are seeking. But there is nowhere else, apart from where we stand, that the treasure can be found. The situation which has been assigned to me as my fate, the things that happen to me day after day – these contain my essential task and such fulfilment of existence as is open to me. For it is here, where we stand, that we should try to make shine the light of the hidden divine life.

Scripture (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

'This Law which I am laying down for you today is neither obscure for you nor beyond your reach. It is not in heaven, so that you need to wonder, "Who will go up to heaven for us, so that we can hear and practise it?" Nor is it beyond the seas, so that you need to wonder, "Who will cross the seas and bring it back to us, so that we can hear and practise it?" No, the word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to put into practice.'

Tuesday (St. Teresa of Avila)

When I see people very anxious to know what sort of prayer they practise, covering their faces and afraid to move or think, lest they should lose any slight tenderness and devotion they feel, I know how little they feel, I know how little they understand how to attain union with God. If you see someone sick whom you can relieve, have compassion on them; if they are in pain, feel it as if it were your own, and, when there is need, fast so that they may eat. This is the true union of our will with the will of God. If you possess fraternal charity, I assure you that you will attain the union I have described.

Scripture (Matthew 25:33-40)

The King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the upright will say, "Lord, when did we do these things?" And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of mine, you did it to me."

Wednesday (John Main OSB)

Just as we can cut God down to our own size impose our identity on God, so we can do this with other people. Indeed, if we do it to God we inevitably do it to other people. This command comes to us from Christ himself: whoever loves God must also love his neighbour. We love both or neither. In prayer, we develop our capacity to turn our whole being towards the Other. We learn to let our neighbour be just as we learn to let God be. We learn not to manipulate our neighbour but rather to reverence them, to reverence their importance, the wonder of their being; in other words, we learn to love our neighbour.

Scripture (1John 4:11-13,16)

My dear friends, if God loved us so much, we too should love each other. No one has ever seen God, but as long as we love each other God remains in us and his love comes to perfection in us. This is the proof that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us a share in his Spirit. We have recognised for ourselves, and put our faith in, the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.

Thursday (Letters from a Russian Monk)

When our souls are subject to the passions such as conceit, vanity or anger we think that all people are blameworthy and no good. However, we have not been commanded to require love and justice from others, but it is our own duty to fulfil the commandments of love and to be just. In times of trouble go deep into Holy Scriptures and into prayer. Then you will experience peace and quiet in your soul.

Scripture (Psalm 119:1-6)

How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law of the Lord! Blessed are those who observe his instructions, who seek him with all their hearts, and, doing no evil, who walk in his ways. You lay down your precepts to be carefully kept. May my ways be steady in doing your will. Then I shall not be shamed, if my gaze is fixed on your commandments.